

BACKGROUND

Tucson Electric Power Company (TEP) has applied to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) for a Presidential Permit to construct and operate a double-circuit, 345,000-volt (345-kV) electric transmission line across the United States border with Mexico. Under Executive Order (EO) 10485 of September 3, 1953, as amended by EO 12038 of February 3, 1978, a Presidential Permit is required to construct, connect, operate, or maintain facilities at the U.S. international border for the transmission of electric energy between the United States and a foreign country. DOE has determined that the issuance of a Presidential Permit to TEP for the proposed project would constitute a major Federal action that may have a significant impact on the environment within the meaning of the *National Environmental Policy Act* of 1969 (NEPA) 42 United States Code (U.S.C.) §4321 et seq. For this reason, DOE has prepared this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate potential environmental impacts from the proposed Federal action (granting a Presidential Permit for the proposed transmission facilities) and reasonable alternatives, including the No Action Alternative.

This EIS was prepared in accordance with Section 102(2)(c) of NEPA, Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 *Code of Federal Regulations* [CFR] 1500-1508), and DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures (10 CFR 1021). DOE is the lead Federal Agency, as defined by 40 CFR 1501.5. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission, U.S. and Mexico (USIBWC), are cooperating agencies. Each of these organizations will use the EIS for its own NEPA purposes, as described in the Federal Agencies' Purpose and Need and Authorizing Actions section of this summary.

NEPA requires Federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions. To meet this requirement, Federal agencies prepare a detailed statement known as an EIS for actions that may have a significant impact on the environment. As part of the NEPA process, the preparation of an EIS includes two formal opportunities for public input: (1) the public scoping period, and (2) the Draft EIS review period, both of which are described further in the Public Participation section of this summary. Following the Draft EIS review period of at least 45 days (that must include at least one public hearing), a lead agency, in coordination with any cooperating agencies, will prepare a Final EIS that will respond to oral and written comments received during public review of the Draft EIS. Other environmental review requirements may also be implemented through the NEPA process. In the case of the proposed project, other environmental review requirements implemented through NEPA include a Floodplains and Wetlands Assessment, in accordance with EO 11988, *Floodplain Management* and EO 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*; *Clean Air Act* Conformity requirements, threatened and endangered species consultation required under the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA), and consultation under the *National Historic Preservation Act* (NHPA).

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The 345-kV double-circuit transmission line would consist of twelve transmission line wires, or conductors, and two neutral ground wires that would provide both lightning protection and fiber optic communications, on a single set of support structures. The transmission line would originate at TEP's existing South Substation (which TEP would expand), in the vicinity of Sahuarita, Arizona, and interconnect with the Citizens Communications (Citizens) system at a Gateway Substation that TEP would construct west of Nogales, Arizona. The double-circuit transmission line would continue from the Gateway Substation south to cross the U.S.-Mexico border and extend approximately 60 miles (mi) (98 kilometers [km]) into the Sonoran region of Mexico, connecting with the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE, the national electric utility of Mexico) at CFE's Santa Ana Substation.